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SUBJECT: NSC Senior Director Michael Green's Meeting with Minister/Chairman of the Government Office Doan Manh Giao

REF: STATE 21232

1. (SBU) Summary: NSC Senior Director for Asia Dr. Michael J. Green and the Ambassador discussed bilateral relations and regional strategic dynamics with Minister/Chairman of the Government Office Doan Manh Giao on February 4. Giao urged the removal of Vietnam's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom before the Prime Minister's planned June 2005 visit and called for the conclusion of bilateral WTO negotiations by then. Giao also pledged the GVN's commitment to the new religious ordinance, in letter and spirit, and acknowledged the need for increasing the pace of legal amendments for WTO accession. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Following their meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan (septel), NSC Senior Director Mike Green and the Ambassador met with Minister/Chairman of the Government Office Doan Manh Giao on February 4 to continue discussions about bilateral relations and regional cooperation. Raising the issue of China's growing role in the region, Dr. Green emphasized the mutually reinforcing aspect of bilateral relations among Asian countries and the relations of those countries with the United States. The evolving architecture of regional forums including APEC, an East Asian Summit and Six Party Talks to address concerns about the DPRK's nuclear proliferation, should all be mutually reinforcing as well, Dr. Green said. Vietnam is in a good position to positively influence this architecture as it prepares to host the APEC Summit in 2006, he noted.

3. (SBU) Dr. Green raised the possibility of an exchange of notes on a religious freedom work plan for Vietnam (reftel) that would have as its target the lifting of Vietnam's CPC designation. He explained that although this would be a step-by-step process, Vietnam has already shown it has taken initial steps, and the USG remains confident that we could have positive dialogue on religious freedom along with a comprehensive list of other bilateral issues.

3. (SBU) Giao agreed that a work plan on CPC would address short-term goals of preparing for the Prime Minister's visit and long-term goals of improving bilateral relations. Doi Moi (economic renovation) reforms have contributed to many reforms in the political system of Vietnam, Giao explained, including a more active National Assembly and the accountability of the Prime Minister to the National Assembly. The GVN has also implemented reforms in legal procedures, transparency of the court system and public administration. Official gazettes explaining policy changes have also increased from just 12 per year to 361 in 2004 with ten million copies distributed.

4. (SBU) Giao urged removal of the CPC designation this year, citing the new religious ordinance that clearly prohibits forced renunciations of faith. Giao said he carried this message from the Prime Minister (PM): Vietnam wants to build a stable, lasting relationship with the United States. The PM has already asked him to begin mobilizing relevant ministries in preparation for his trip to the United States this summer and explore the possibility of signing MOUs on economic and technical cooperation, agriculture, maritime transport, military training and adoptions. These MOUs, combined with work plans, would then establish a legal foundation to move forward. WTO is another key issue, and Vietnam hopes to end negotiations before the PM's visit, Giao stressed.

5. (SBU) Regarding religious freedom, Dr. Green responded that demonstrating the GVN's commitment to both the letter and spirit of the new ordinance is imperative to convince the people of both countries that progress is being made in the next few months. September would be the earliest juncture when CPC would be reviewed, but even if Vietnam remains on the list, the two countries should demonstrate the intent to move in the right direction.

6. (SBU) Green cautioned that completing WTO negotiations before the PM's visit would be difficult in light of the

legal changes Vietnam must still enact to be in compliance with international standards; however, a joint statement or high level meetings could demonstrate our intention to move forward. The Ambassador added that Vietnam's accession to the WTO by the end of 2005 is doable but difficult, and the key factor is the National Assembly's ability to modify appropriate laws and provide evidence of these changes to WTO members. One possible solution would be to construct an "umbrella law" that would avoid requiring a complete review of every law in each sector, the Ambassador suggested. This is a decision for the GVN to make, and we can work together on either course Vietnam decides to take, he said.

17. (U) Giau concluded that the GVN is committed to enforcing the ordinance on religion with the "utmost spirit" and that it takes into account the views of its friends, including the United States, on this and other issues. He also agreed that Vietnam must meet international legal standards to join WTO, but noted the pace of amending laws would be a challenge. Thirty laws were amended this year and 42 are expected to be amended in 2005, he noted.

18. (U) Bio note: Giau was born in 1944 in Hue. He graduated from Vietnam Military Academy as an engineer. After that, he spent some time working as a teacher at the Academy. He studied in China, and speaks Chinese well. In 1983 or 1984, he transferred to the Government Office in the capacity of China Expert. From 1992 - 2001, he was Vice Chairman of the Government Office, then was promoted Minister/Chairman in 2001. He speaks little English and does not use it in official meetings. He was impressive in this meeting, both in his candor and his apparent willingness to engage in an exchange designed to find creative solutions.

19. (SBU) Dr. Green cleared this cable.

MARINE